my crown on the head of a creature

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my crown on the head of a creature

by skvadern

Summary

“There are better things to be than dead."
“Also worse things,” Will replies.

The faery that calls itself Hannibal Lecter happens across a homeless Will Graham on a cold evening and offers him a bed for the night. Things...escalate.

Notes

Title from Waltz for Lecter by Halia Meguid

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

> A stranger offers Will salvation. Will proceeds to look the gift horse directly in the mouth and start counting teeth.

As the streetlight across the sidewalk from his alleyway flickers on, a guard to dispel the gathering night, Will Graham considers his options. The cold is bitter and biting, and he can tell it's going to get worse. A killer of a freeze – it's the right time of year for it. He'll need to get up soon and find somewhere inside; not even the thermal sleeping bag he's managed to hang on to is going to get him through tonight. The shelters will be filling quickly. Normally, this time of year, he'd have found somewhere already. He should probably move now.

He doesn't move. He sits on his backpack, legs criss-cross, and leans his head back against the dumpster. After being outside all day, even wrapped up in pretty much everything he owns, he's gotten acclimatised to the cold. Too acclimatised, maybe. He can't really feel his feet.

He should be moving, generating some body heat. Sitting still is suicide. But God help him, he's too tired to do anything but listen to the quick footsteps passing by his alleyway, hurrying home from the icy dark.

Someone stops. Almost in front of him. Probably looking into the corner store beside where he's sitting, wondering if they've got milk at home or if they better pick some up, just in case. He doesn't look to check.

There's a rustle and creak of fabric and shoe leather as whoever it is crouches down in front of him. Will should open his eyes, but it seems like a lot of effort.

"Hello," the mystery person says. Will is pretty sure the guy's talking to him. He's got an accent, something European. "My name is Dr Lecter. Would you like a place to sleep tonight?"

There we go then. Will could have pointed him to someone less ragged, but there's no accounting for taste. "Forty dollars, fifty if you want me to take a shower first."

Dr Lecter huffs softly – amusement, Will thinks, then tries to stop thinking. "I'm afraid you've misunderstood me, although I suppose I can't blame you. I'm not soliciting you, merely offering shelter."

Now Will does open his eyes. The guy crouching in front of him is well dressed, well groomed. He has a rather singular face, and nothing behind his eyes. Whatever this is, it isn't

charity.

“Can I ask why?”

A smile, or just a flick of one. There and gone again, with no more warmth behind it than in the plastic of the dumpsters behind Will’s back. “It’s a very cold night, and it’s only going to get colder. If you stay on the streets, you’ll likely be dead by morning.”

“True, but I don’t care,” Will says, and wonders if it’s a lie or not. Probably not, and isn’t that depressing. “As a matter of fact, neither do you.”

“There are better things to be than dead,” the doctor says.

“Also worse things,” Will replies. There’s something almost restful about looking into a face that doesn’t give anything away.

Another quick smile. “I can promise you nothing worse than a shower, a hot meal and a comfortable bed.”

“For the price of what, exactly?” Behind Dr Lecter’s shoulder, a ghost of a memory says *Quid pro quo, William*. He blinks hard.

“No price. Just my good deed for the day.”

There will be a price, he’s sure of it. He’s also fairly sure he won’t like it. Will doesn’t want to get up, and walk into a stranger’s car and a stranger’s house and another horror story.

The temperature is still dropping, and Will can almost smell the frost creeping over the dumpster’s black plastic. If he sits still long enough, it’ll cover him too. He’s seen it happen to plenty of people by now, and he wonders if it won’t be peaceful.

Still, he got this far. It would be a shame to die in front of a dumpster.

When Dr Lecter offers him a hand, Will takes it.

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The heat of the car is painful for most of the ride back, and Will curls into himself and wonders distantly why he didn’t just stay where he was. At least hypothermia wouldn’t hurt so much.

He’s pretty much thawed out by the time they get to the house; well, he says house. Mansion would apply. It’s got three stories, and there are pillars in front of the door. He shoots a look at Dr Lecter, who just gets out the car. Will supposes a guy with a suit that good and a car this lovely wouldn’t stint on a nice house as well. Wealth and good taste on his skin, under his
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hands, all around him when he sleeps. A beautiful world to exist in. A shell of luxury to keep the ugliness out.

He needs to stop making associations and get out the goddamn car.

Lecter is waiting for him just inside the door. He holds his arm out, a parody of a butler – Will can't imagine this man as anyone's servant. Something about the gesture prickles at the hairs on the back of his neck.

Step into my parlour, said the spider to the fly.

Will darts his eyes to the frost on the stone below his feet. For an odd, wild second, he thinks about running.

He steps in, and Lecter shuts the door behind him.

Inside is about what he was expecting. Fine stone and wood, colours dark and rich. The décor is oddly tasteful for being so gothic.

"You have a beautiful home."

That gets him a smile larger than the others have been. His politeness, Will thinks. His appreciation. He's starting to get worried – not, that is, that he ever stops. "Thank you," Lecter says, and takes his coat and fleece. Will feels like a shit when the man hangs them up next to his own beautiful wool overcoat, but he seems unconcerned and it's not like Will made him. He slides his backpack off his shoulder and sets it by the door.

Will goes to scrub his hand over the back of his neck, but stops when he thinks of what he might knock on the carpet. There are places you can go to get clean, and normally Will uses them, but he hasn't had the energy recently. He's filthy, and suddenly very aware of it. "I'll go have that shower. I assume that's okay with you, seeing as you were trying not to make faces about how I smell the whole of that car ride."

Lecter pauses. There's a considering look on his face when he turns to face Will again, and he tries not to shiver. "May I ask how you know that?" Evidently, the guy's not used to people seeing through the gaps in that perfect mask of his.

"The same way I know you want something from me and you think I'm not going to like you getting it, but you're not going to assault me. The same way I know that beyond getting whatever it is you want, you don't actually care whether I live or die." Will bends to untie his laces and get his boots off, mostly to keep his face turned away from the doctor's polite scalpel of a gaze. "We both have empathy disorders, Dr Lecter. You have too little, I have too much."

It's only once he's placed his boots neatly by the door that he realises how much harder it will be to do a runner now, without coat and boots and backpack. That *would* be suicidal, on a night like this. Normally these considerations are second nature, but Lecter's house is warm and dark and smells nice and Will wasn't thinking. Why the fuck wasn't he thinking?

Lecter must sense his sudden unease, because he backs off a bit, walking away from Will. “Take your shower – it’s on the first floor, second door on the right. Towels are in the cupboard. I’ll leave out some of my old clothes for you, then prepare us some dinner.”

The word *dinner* sends a sudden sick stab through Will’s gut. Stupid, he knows, paranoid and stupid. The meal had been part of what the doctor had offered, the sort of thing anyone would offer a homeless guy. But he’s already a little rattled, skipping another meal won’t kill him – and he can’t make himself, he just can’t. “That’s kind, but I ate today. I’ll be fine.”

“Please,” Lecter says, turning to him again, “I insist.”

And that, that scares Will, properly scares him. He wishes he hadn’t taken off his boots. He wishes he’d just hauled ass to the nearest shelter. They might have had a bed. He might have been that lucky.

“Look,” he says, trying to keep his voice even, “I’ve got an anxiety thing as well as the empathy thing, and some of that’s related to food. If you try and feed me I will definitely have a panic attack, and I think that’s more mess than you want to deal with.” Lecter doesn’t strike him as the sort to tolerate such dramatic displays of emotion; that might persuade him. “So if it’s all the same to you, I’ll just go have a shower.”

Lecter considers this, and Will can’t help but hold his breath. After what seems like much longer than a few seconds, he nods. “Of course, my apologies. Please let me know if you need anything, I’ll be in the kitchen or the study.”

Will breathes again, and tries very hard not to run up the stairs.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Possibly, Will should have run away while he still had the chance.

Chapter Notes

things get Creepy in part 2 of this chapter - Hannibal isn't much known for respecting boundaries even as a human. neither party considers it sexual assault, but i'm aware readers might. if you'd rather be safe then you can just leave a comment and i'll summarise.

The shower almost knocks the anxiety out of him entirely. Watching accumulated grime swirl down the drain as the water slowly runs clear is a wonderfully uncomplicated pleasure, and Will groans with relief as he works shampoo through his hair for the second time.

When he steps out in a cloud of steam and wraps himself in a ridiculously soft towel, he feels like a new person. Stronger, more clear headed. He can nearly laugh at himself, now, for refusing dinner.

Nearly. Not enough to go back downstairs.

Lecter has left clothes, as promised, just outside the door. A pyjama set; thick, soft plaid fabric. There's a toothbrush still in its packaging and an unopened tube of toothpaste beside them. He's also left a note resting on top, copperplate writing on good thick paper. Will shakes his head in vague disbelief.

If you leave out your clothes I will launder them for you. The bedroom next door has been made up. Please feel free to stay as long as you like. I won't call the police if you take something – there's nothing here that's irreplaceable. Sleep well.

What kind of a guy, Will wonders, offers a man a room for the night, all but invites the man to steal from him, and launders his damn clothes, at no cost whatsoever? Another person, maybe Will could dismiss it as simple good Samaritanism. But not this person. If Dr Lecter doesn't score high enough on a psychopathy test to raise the eyebrows of a Wall Street trader, Will would eat his hat.

So what does he gain out of this?

The part of Will that still lives in the pale house has an answer, but he doesn't want to listen to it. Dr Lecter hasn't set of any of his more unusual alarm bells, or at least, no more than everyone else does.

Maybe it's a rich people thing. Who the hell knows. But he has to admit it beats freezing to death.

When he's dressed and brushed his teeth, Will leaves the bathroom. The bed in the next room is worlds better than anything he'd get at a shelter. It's huge, covered with soft looking flannel sheets in a rich, dark red. When he sits on the mattress, he almost groans. His body is so used to concrete and stone that he doesn't even know if he'll be able to sleep on this.

Apparently he can, since as soon as he slides under the covers he passes right out, head barely settling on the pillow.

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Will opens his eyes and there is a *thing* at the foot of the bed.

The room is dark, but *it* is darker, a blackness that seems to suck in light so that it's nothing but a shape, a monstrous silhouette. It looks like it could have been a man, impossibly tall and thin as a famine victim. Antlers jut from its head, huge and curling up and out like the branches of a dead tree. They'd be beautiful, on a stag; here, they are paralyzingly awful.

Nice rack, Will thinks, dizzy with horror.

The *thing* – monster, demon, nightmare – oh fuck, Will knows exactly what it is – takes a deep breath. It's scenting him, his fear and nausea and useless rage at being so stupid and so trapped *again*, and while he can't see its expression, or even if it has a face to express emotion on, Will can just tell it's delighted.

"Apologies," the nightmare says, voice familiarly accented and as smooth as the slide into hypothermia. "I didn't mean to wake you."

It moves towards him, almost gliding, and sits down on the bed next to where he lies paralyzed. This close, he can feel the cold radiating off it in waves, a chill that sinks teeth into his bones, gnawing at the very marrow of him. Now the half-light falls on its face, and it looks ancient and inhuman, Dr Lecter's face carved into obsidian by some mad craftsman – it reaches for him and slides two fingers tipped with wicked claws under his chin, tilting his head up so he can't help but meet its blank black eyes. Shaking, breathless, Will falls into them.

Associations come quickly – *sharp ice and empty night skies and wild black forests choked by snow and* hunger, *hunger so ancient and powerful, no end and no possibility of satiation*, *hunger almost* alive – from far away, Will realises he is hyperventilating, sweat freezing on
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his skin, and the faery whose home he walked into like a lamb to slaughter smiles at him, amused and almost *fond* –

Then an icy hand settles over his eyes and Will is back in his own head. He gasps and chokes, drawing in deep drowning breaths and shaking from the cold. Somehow, it isn't numbing – he can still feel it everywhere, inside him even, leeched into his lungs through the air and soaked into his blood.

"Remarkable boy," the faery says from far above him. "I think I would like to eat your heart."

"Then do it," Will forces out through chattering teeth. There are worse things than dying, so much worse, he'd rather just get it over with. "Not like I can stop you."

The faery actually chuckles at that, the sound seeming to drift down to his ears like snow. "I do admire your courage. All in good time."

Will squeezes his eyes shut, queasy with horror on top of horror. "So you like to play with your food, then." He feels so *weak*, pinned to the sheets by his own panic and the almost solid pressure of his captor's regard.

"A good meal should be savoured," it replies, and he can feel it leaning in, hear its antlers scraping against the wall and digging into the pillow as it bends down to him. It *licks* him, running its tongue over his cheek to collect fear-sweat and, god, tears, he's been crying without even noticing it. He sinks his teeth deep into his lip to hold back a whimper.

When the chapped skin breaks and he draws blood, the faery goes still. Will freezes, heart somehow pounding even harder.

The fingers still under his chin are taken away, and then one of them slides over his lip to collect the blood there and this time Will really does whimper, a pathetic sound that makes him want to kill himself. His eyes are still blessedly covered, but he can't help imagining the faery bringing the finger up to its lips, cold tongue darting out to taste the hot red life of him.

And suddenly the faery is leaning down again, hand sliding off his eyes as it takes his cut lip between its own and *sucks* in a gruesome parody of a kiss. Will keeps his eyes tight shut, unable to breathe. One of its hands is cupping his face, horrifically tender. Any moment, he is sure, the faery will draw back and begin to use those claws, carve out more blood, rip him to pieces and eat him raw and weeping.

But then it lets his lip go and pulls back, hand still resting against his cheek. The claws are just under his eyes. He doesn't dare look.

"I did promise you a good night's sleep," the faery says, sounding almost wistful. "And since you were kind enough to give me a taste…"

Will wants to laugh, wants to cry, wants to start screaming and never stop, but then those cold, cold lips press lightly to his forehead and he's falling uncontrollably back into sleep.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The morning after, featuring panic attacks and a complete lack of breakfast.

The worst part is, he actually wakes up feeling rested. For a minute, at least, before the memories of his dream crash down and smash him against a cliff face of panic.

By the time his vision clears, Will is curled in a ball in the opposite corner of the room, eye sockets pressed hard against his knees. His throat hurts, so it's fifty-fifty whether or not he was screaming. He doesn't know how long he was out.

He stays crouched for a few minutes, dreading looking up in case Lecter is in the room, watching. In his human skin or as whatever the fuck he was last night, Will isn't sure which would terrify him more. But when the pain in his muscles finally makes him lift his head, he's alone.

His clothes are sitting in a neat, folded pile on a chest at the foot of the bed. When he walks over on shaky legs to investigate, he realises that they're all cleaner than they were when he got them, and any holes or tears have vanished as if they never were. Everything smell fresh and clean, with no trace of a chemical detergent.

For a crazy moment, Will thinks of the Elf and the Shoemaker, and can't hold back a bark of hysterical laughter.

He tugs them on, layer on layer. They're wonderfully soft against his skin, and he itches to rip them off.

Dressed, he crosses to the door and stands there, torn. If he stays in here, Lecter will come for him anyway – this is his house, his land, nothing Will can do is going to keep him out. If he leaves the room, he'll run into the faery that much faster.

There is no way in Hell he gets to just walk out the front door. But he can also see how funny it would be for his captor, to leave the door unlocked only for Will to refuse to even try it.

He has to try. If there's any chance he can get out of this, he couldn't live with himself if he didn't at least *try*.

The door opens without resistance, which is a start at least.

There's an empty feeling to the house that reassures him somewhat, but he can't help but move like a frightened rabbit. Which he is, as far as Lecter is concerned. At least the

windows look out onto a normal Baltimore, which should means he's still in something approaching the real world. That's nice, then.

Will goes to the front door first, because he needs to, and it *opens*, it actually opens out onto a cold winter morning, frost and the faint tang of car exhaust in the air. He steps out, the stone chilling his socked feet, and finds he can cross the threshold of the columns, walk all the way down the driveway and onto the pavement.

For a little while, Will doesn't have room for confusion, just a warm wash of relief. He smiles like an idiot, probably worrying the lady who passes by with her dog, and doesn't give a single shit. He can leave. He's free to leave.

It's easier to make himself go back into the house, now he knows he can get out again. He means to just grab everything, shove his feet into his boots and bolt, but something tugs at him and he finds himself walking through the opulent blue dining room and into the kitchen before he thinks to fight it.

Sitting on the spotless counter top are, from left to right; a change of clothes, three pairs of good wool socks, a large stack of bills with equally large numbers on them, a note in the same thick paper as last night, and everything Will would need for a continental breakfast.

The note says *Go in peace. I hope we meet again.*

Will sinks to the floor and laughs until he cries.

Then he picks himself up and washes his face in the sink, careful to keep his lips shut tight in case that counts as drinking Lecter's water. He takes the clothes and the socks, means to leave the money until he sees how much it is and then he can't really justify not taking it. Besides, money is a social construct more than anything else, he's fairly sure it won't bind him in the same way eating from Lecter's table would have.

None of this makes any sense to him. But he's not stupid enough to assume the rules he's been playing by for the past few years are exhaustive, or apply to every faery out there. Maybe Lecter really was just planning to wash his clothes, traumatise him, give him money, taste his blood and let him walk right out of here.

No price, he'd said yesterday, and *nothing worse than a shower, a hot meal and a comfortable bed*, and the Fair Folk don't lie. That's one thing he knows for certain. Which doesn't mean Lecter couldn't have simply given his own version of the truth. Maybe, by the faery's standards, last night had been nothing more than him checking on his guest to see he was comfortable. Lecter had said he hadn't meant to wake Will, hadn't he?

All of the food goes back in the fridge.

After Will's laced his boots on and pulled on his fleece and coat – both also cleaner than they've been since before he got them – and packed the socks and the spare clothes, and tucked the money into various pockets and hiding places, he unzips a little pocket inside his bag. From it he pulls out a large pendant on a long black cord. He'd gotten it in a New Age

store, and the guy there had told him it would keep evil spirits away. Will doesn't for one second believe that; he'd bought it because it's made of iron as pure as he could find.

He should probably wear it more often, but he doesn't like the reminder. Besides, if Lecter can stand to live around this much steel, a necklace wouldn't have held him off.

Still. He slips it around his neck and tucks it under his shirts, where it burns cold against his chest. It'll warm soon, soaking up his body heat. Will wishes it would hurry.

When he opens the door, the stupid animal part of him that learned last night to pair low temperature with overwhelming terror flinches back, hard. Suddenly, all he wants to do is slam the door shut and run back up to the bed, which is soft and warm. It's always kind of amused Will, how such useful adaptive mechanisms can be so dangerous, in the wrong circumstances. That bed is the last place he should want to end up.

He takes a deep breath, shoulders his bag and steps out into the cold. If he walks fast, he'll be back in the city centre soon enough.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Will starts to get his feet back under him, just in time for his life to take another nose-dive.

It occurs to Will later, curled over himself in a library chair and for once not getting dirty looks from the other patrons, that unless the money Lecter gave him is going to turn to leaves or melt to water, he won't need to beg for a very long while. He could rent a hotel room, an apartment even; that if he's careful and lives cheaply and cleans up enough to get a job, he could get off the streets for good.

He could find work as a mechanic – boat motors are his speciality, but his Dad hadn't been a one-trick pony and he'd made sure his son would have plenty to fall back on if being a cop didn't work out. His medical debts are paid – the thought of *that* still makes him shudder from his core. If he plays his cards right, he could pair his skill with his sob story, find an employer who's interested in one then ply them with the other. The years-long gap in his resume is a problem, but if he's careful with the money, he could hold out for a while, long enough to find someone willing to overlook it. Now he can get an address, he could start rebuilding his life.

Will doesn't have many illusions about himself – he looks like the platonic ideal of a hobo, and he acts like someone who is deeply broken. But a shower, a shave and a haircut, new clothes…they'd go a long way. The act is more difficult, he knows he could do it but he's always been wary of making people suits. Afraid they'll sink down into his skin and he'll wake up one morning to realise he can't take them off. But he can manage it, at least for a while.

His instinct is not to do that. His instinct is to give away all the money that Lecter gave him, find a fucking iron-lined hole and crawl into it and never, ever come out.

No-one is as anonymous as a homeless man, and anonymity is safety. Standing out is dangerous – if you're shiny and bright and *interesting*, it's only natural that something's going to take an interest.

Then again, Lecter had picked him out with a glance, had seen under the wild hobo hair and the grime and the tatty clothes and found something he liked. And God only knows how little protection he has from any corner right now. There's safety in being part of the herd as well, and while he's never been part of anything, he's also never been so isolated as he is sleeping rough. If he's as easy to find in a comfortable bed as he is tucked in a doorway to keep out the rain, Will knows which option he'd prefer.

Two nights after Lecter found him, he rents the cheapest hotel room he can find, and buys toiletries and a shaving kit from the drugstore down the block. The water pressure in the shower is crap, but the water stays at least lukewarm. The mattress is hard and suspiciously stained, but it's in a room he payed for with what's technically his money, and so it's his space.

He'll take it.

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The twenty-four hour corner store around the block from him starts looking for a cashier a couple of days after he gets the room – it's probably something to do with one of the employees being lead out in handcuffs. He applies and gets the job, the owner too harried to do more than give him a stern warning about what he'll do if he catches Will using. After that, it's a recap of half the jobs he had as a kid, only with a slightly more high-tech cash register. He's got all evening and night shifts, so everyone he serves is too tired to give a shit about his various tics. The pay is terrible, but he's still looking for a better job.

Job-hunting is about as easy as he expected, what with the massive gap on his resume and the fact that he's living in a hotel. But it's something, it keeps him occupied between shifts. Normally by the time he's done for the night, he's tired enough not to dream of anything at all.

Will knows he should look into any government run programmes, charities, that sort of thing. It would be the smart thing to do. But the idea of advertising his vulnerability sickens him. He's more paranoid nowadays than he's been in years; the PTSD he was never officially diagnosed with but which he's certain he's got resurging now it has even more material to work with. That's one of the reasons job-hunting isn't going so well – try as he might, he can't keep the twitches down for long. Hyper-alertness itches like a bug bite, and he's sure he much look like he's on something half the time. If his boss suspects so, the man's too exhausted to say anything about it.

He's never even tried drugs, outside the various meds the psychiatric hospital pressed on him. Too pricy, too much chance of addiction, not to mention that the idea of being out of it, out of control, always scares him far more than the promise of peaceful oblivion tempts him. Not that anyone seems to believe him on that.

But he's okay, he's in a holding pattern. With a roof over his head and regular meals, even if it's just fast food, everything feels that little bit more manageable.

Then the corner store is closed for a day – some sort of family thing, Will doesn't ask – and he gets to go to bed when he's not dead on his feet. Unfortunately, this means he also gets to dream.
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He bolts upright at three in the morning, drenched in cold sweat. The only reason he doesn't slide straight into a panic attack is that he's fairly certain Lecter wasn't actually here, that the thing is his nightmare was just a shade conjured by a brain desperate to process what had happened to him. Still, he can remember with perfect clarity what that monster had said to him as it sliced almost delicately into his stomach.

All you have right now, I gave you. What are you going to give me, dear Will? Or have you forgotten what you owe?

Lecter doesn't know his name – Will never told him, never gave him a name or a nickname or anything, and he's so, so relieved he didn't – so it can't have been real. But it might have been *right*.

Whatever else he had done to Will, Lecter had arguably done him a huge fucking favour. He'd stopped Will from dying of hypothermia, and given him enough money to ensure he'd be unlikely to do so in the future. As far as that awful night was concerned, Lecter probably didn't even register it as a violation. He hadn't done Will any permeant harm, had barely touched him, and in Will's experience the fae tended to interpret humans' personal boundaries in whatever way suited them best. Yes, Lecter had promised there'd be no price for his help, but that only explicitly covered Will staying the night, not taking the clothes or the ridiculous pile of cash so conveniently left out for him. It would be just like a faery, to give you a gift so they could trick you into taking something with strings attached.

There's power in blood, Will knows that much. And Lecter has tasted some of his blood, *consumed* it. If he wants to track Will down now, he could. The idea of waking up here, where he's meant to be safe, to find that *thing* crouched over him sends nausea coiling through his stomach. No, he won't let Lecter come for him, he can't risk that. Will knows in his bones that having the illusion that he might be safe ripped from him again would kill him.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> In what is probably the worst idea he's had in a good five years, Will walks straight back into the lion's den.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having walked back to the city proper from Lecter's house, it's easy enough for Will to retrace his steps. After a while, his brain sort of checks out, which works because he would *hate* to be thinking right now. The whole world narrows down to the impact of his feet on the sidewalk and the chill seeping through his coat.

It's over too soon, and only when he's standing in front of Lecter's beautiful house does he realise he has no idea what he's going to say.

Will should go. This was the literal worst idea and he should run now, while he still can.

The door opens. No-one is behind it, it just swings wide to show the rich darkness of the hallway beyond. If Will wasn't so concerned with coming back out of this house again, he'd say something about damned faery drama queens. As it is, he just rolls his eyes, takes a deep breath and steps inside.

When the door swings closed again with a soft *click*, he stops breathing.

The last remnants of the Old South manners his dad had tried to drum into him make him bend to unlace his boots, before he jerks back upright. Polite or not, no way in Hell is he going to be walking round barefoot. Instead, he gives his boots several wipes on the doormat and deliberately doesn't take off his coat.

Faint strains of something classical and calming lead him down the corridor to a room he didn't enter last time. It's as elegantly ornate as the rest of the house, and warm too, wonderfully warm. The fireplace is lit, flames crackling merrily, and the dissonance of heat where he expected more of that bone-deep cold shocks Will so much, he doesn't notice the person in the armchair until he raises his head.

Lecter is back in his human skin and another fine plaid suit. Sitting in the chair like it's a throne, he looks ridiculously good, powerful and as assured of that power as a lioness over her kill. Will's skin draws tight, his gut aching with atavistic terror. It takes everything he has not to bolt.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you again,” Lecter says. Will’s nightmare had gotten the accent and intonation right, but he can tell now there was something flat about it. Lecter’s voice in real life sounds heavier somehow, fuller. It has centuries behind it. “I had hoped, but I wasn’t expecting it.” He invites Will to sit in the other chair with a regal wave of his arm, and Will almost refuses. But to stand in front of the seated faery like a naughty child in front of the principle’s desk would be unbearable. He sits like the chair is going to swallow him.

There’s a cup of what appears to be coffee sitting on a little glass table beside the chair. Will very deliberately ignores it.

“I’ve come to bargain.”

Will can’t tell if this surprises Lecter or not; the skin-and-bone mask of his face gives nothing away. “For what, exactly?”

“I took the things you left me. The clothes, the money. The things you didn’t cover in our agreement. I won’t be in your debt, you’re not putting me in your debt. So we can sort out whatever your problem is and then I’ll get out your hair.” His tone is too sharp, *rude, William*, but fear is slicking his palms with sweat and he’s too focussed on keeping his ass in the chair to be polite.

Lecter blinks at him, an almost feline expression of surprise that Will is certain he’s faking. “I had considered those things a gift.”

Will freezes. *Shit*.

The air in his lungs turns leaden and sharp with imagined cold, and his vision tunnels down. Not only has he just grievously insulted Lecter by trying to repay him for a gift – he’s never figured out why the fae take exception to that, but he knows they do, Jesus, do they ever – but he’s just given Lecter the perfect excuse to get something out of him, free of fucking charge. He couldn’t have fucked up worse if he tried.

Affecting ignorance of his panic – though Will is sure he’s noticed, the bastard – Lecter stands and walks away to a desk, where he starts copying something down on a piece of card. “There is something you can do for me, if you’re so eager to discharge your perceived debt.” He walks back over to Will, who can’t help stiffening as the faery draws nearer. But all Lecter does is offer him the card. It has an address written on it in the same ornate writing as the other notes. Will stares.

“There’s a bar at this address. A mortal woman with a horseshoe necklace will be working there at midnight. I’d like you to meet her. After that, we can consider ourselves even.”

Will blinks hard, trying to control the sense that he’s between the claws of a cat who’s just decided that instead of eating him, it’s going to have some *fun*. Lecter had admitted to playing with his food. “What is this, a matchmaking service?”

Lecter smiles, small and amused. “Hardly. But I think the two of you will get on, and she has certain connections that might help you settle back into society.”

Will can't help the flat stare he levels at the faery, who looks disgustingly pleased with himself, in a very quiet, non-expressive way. "What do you get out of this?" Because there's something, there's always something, Will Graham doesn't *get* breaks like this and the Fair Folk don't give breaks at all.

That smile, again, and Will's fists ache with the stupid, reckless urge to punch it off. "Perhaps you'll be able to figure that out. From what I've seen of you, you're very perceptive."

It's like that awful, tense morning again, hardly daring to believe it could be as easy as walking out the front door, terrified that it only seems so easy because he hasn't yet spotted the worse threat around the corner. Will forces his hand up to finally take the card from Lecter's fingers. He waits until the faery backs up before he stands, keeping as much space between them as possible. Lecter, fuck him sideways, does back up, as far as his desk. Giving Will his space, and Will ruthlessly squashes the pathetic corner of his broken brain that's grateful.

Figuring he might as well get while the going's good, he turns to leave.

"Before you go –" Lecter says, and Will stops in the doorway, turning to face him with his heart in his throat. "I've told you my name. Might I have yours?"

Will notices the trap instantly, and his skin crawls with fear born of bitter memory. Still, he can't resist the opportunity to be a bit of a shit. "You can call me Ainsel."

Lecter blinks, then smirks. "Clever boy," he says, sounding as pleased as a cat in a puddle of sunlight, with a few yellow feathers hanging out its mouth. Without meaning to - before he even knows he's done it - Will meets his eyes.

For a second Will's mind is frost-rimmed, bursting full of amusement and acquisitiveness and a terrible alien curiosity, burning and detached all at once. Like a scientist, peering with fascination down into the maze to see where the rat will scurry next. He breaks eye contact, turns on his heel and all but runs out the door.

Only once he's crossed three streets and is sure he's not being followed does he realise he still has the card clenched in his fist. He aches desperately to throw it away, because whatever this it's just going to drag him in deeper to whatever the fuck game Lecter wants to play with him.

But he can't. That's not how it works.

Cursing himself for a fool, Will smooths out the card and tucks it into his pocket, where its presence burns through the lining of his jacket and into his skin.

Chapter End Notes

Ainsel

Next chapter - a wild Margot appears!

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

> Will discharges his debt, and may have gained a friend in the process. Also, there's a dog.

Her name is Margot, and Will can already tell she's just as fucked up as him. Something about how practiced her fake expressions are – if he wasn't so perceptive, he'd never have known how tired she is, how much she wants to just clock out and go home – and how she watches everyone in the dark, close room, subtle but very aware.

"This is pretty much all I'm qualified for," she tells him, her customer service smile perfect when she glances at the other patrons, checking no-one needs another drink. The bar's pretty empty, this late on a week night. "And even then, I got it through a friend."

"That's how trust fund kids get their state senate or law firm jobs," he replies, "so I wouldn't feel too bad."

Her smile turns a bit sharper, more real. "Oh, I don't feel bad at all. The pay's decent, even if my girlfriend had to bring home most of the bacon." There's some inside joke behind that idiom, he can tell. "What about you, looking for work?"

Will takes another sip of his whiskey, weighing his words. He likes Margot already, but he can't forget who sent him here. "An acquaintance of mine seemed to think you could help me."

She narrows her eyes at him, almost playful – if he couldn't tell how aware of him she suddenly is. "And that acquaintance would be?"

He doesn't particularly want to say the name, especially since he doesn't know if it'll help his case or not, but she's going to need something. "He calls himself Dr Lecter."

At that, Margot actually grins and, wonder of wonders, loosens up a little. "Oh, Hannibal, you might have said before."

"How do you know him?" Will asks cautiously.

"He's my girlfriend's friend, really. But they're close enough that I had to befriend him too, you know how it is." She gives him an odd, searching look, and he realises that they're both trying to figure out how much the other knows, edging around the supernatural elephant in the room. No-one's ever taught him how to subtly indicate to someone that you know about the existence of the fae, while making sure they also know what you think they know before

you open your mouth and get yourself sectioned – again, in his case. Will wonders if Margot's done this particular dance before.

Maybe she has, because after a few seconds she nods and says "The doctorate's real, you know. He actually did an MD."

That surprises a laugh out of him. "Seriously?"

Margot grins back, suddenly looking much younger. "Oh yes. Apparently he did all his assignments, no tricks whatsoever. Did his residency, worked as a surgeon for a while, and he still practices sometimes. I think he must have been *spectacularly* bored."

Will leans back on his stool, shaking his head, still laughing. Jesus, a faery doctor. Before that, a faery doing actual exams in an actual exam hall. His brain conjures crazy images of the massive antlered monster delicately holding a pencil and marking answers on a scantron. Judging by Margot's wide smile, she's picturing the same thing.

Someone from along the bar raises a hand, and when Margot's done serving them, Will's stopped laughing and has started considering the implications of Lecter having *friends*. Margot doesn't behave at all like she's under a glamour – in fact, he can't remember the last time he met someone so present. He hadn't thought faeries made friends, even among their own kind. Certainly not with random humans.

When she comes back, he asks, "So your girlfriend, is she…" He lets the question tail off, not really sure what the correct terminology is in this situation, or if he really wants to know.

Thankfully, Margot puts him out his misery. "She's not the same as Hannibal is, but essentially yes."

"And that…works for you?" Will can't help but ask, and gets a rueful grin in response.

"Whatever you're imagining, it's not like that. It's actually the healthiest relationship I've ever been in, all things considered."

Will's face must do something, because Margot reaches over the bar and takes his hand. "I can make Hannibal back off, if you want," she says. She's telling the truth, she's not trying to trick or trap him and she *gets it*, and this is the first kind, uncomplicated, human touch he's had in years. She squeezes his hand, strong grip and thin fingers, and he can't find words to thank her for this, for a few minutes of conversation and this simple, wonderful acceptance. The mistrust seeps out of him like water through a cracked hull.

He stays until closing time. Margot has tables to wipe down and a last few patrons to see to, but they talk a little more, nice normal topics. Small talk. Will remembers distantly how much he used to hate this; strange, now, to crave it so much.

When Margot and the coworker who may have been napping in a back room finally cash out and lock up, they walk out together. Will's not sure how he ends up in the shotgun seat of Margot's little car, but he figures that she'd have objected by now if she wanted to. It starts

raining while they drive, big fat sleety drops, and Will basks in the serenity that comes from being warm and dry and listening to rain fall outside. It's familiar and unfamiliar all at once.

Margot and her girlfriend live about half an hour out from Baltimore, practically out in the country – the iron, he supposes. Not that it seems to bother Lecter much.

And isn't it wonderful, that the mad bastard faery who just retraumatised him occupies so much of his head?

Margot sighs as she parks and looks out the car window, where the rain has turned completely to sleet. "Fuck, I didn't bring my umbrella."

"We'll have to run for it," Will says, and she grins at him, eyes thawing out and posture loosening. It's being on her own land, he thinks, that makes her feel more secure. The watchful thing behind her face is already calming, like a dog turning circles in its bed before it settles.

They pop the car doors together and sprint through the freezing sleet, Margot letting out a little undignified shriek, and they're both laughing like kids when they reach the door. Will's laugh is rusty, catching in funny ways in his throat, but Margot doesn't seem to care.

The inside of their house is clean and bright, creamy walls and splashes of colour. It's homey and unpretentious and entirely unlike Lecter's, and the thought brings him up short and kills the last of his chuckles.

"She's not here," Margot tells him, when she catches the stiffening in his shoulders. "She's either at a conference or a court thing, I'll ask when she gets back." She sheds her coat as she talks, and dumps her bag unceremoniously on the couch in the hallway. Every line of her body is easy, familiar, and Will can feel some of it seeping into him. Emotional osmosis; it's always been a problem of his.

Then his head snaps up and round as he hears the frantic clatter of claws on floorboards. Seconds later, an absolutely gorgeous white-and-fawn mongrel hurls itself at Margot with the delighted abandon of a dog discovering its owner has not, in fact, left it forever. Margot chuckles and bends over it, lavishing it with pets and cooing to it softly.

The dog, having reassured itself that its owner is real and not going anywhere, finally notices Will. It puts its head on the side and pads over to him, tentative but not cautious. When he offers a hand, it sniffs it delicately, then rubs up against it. Will scratches at the soft fur behind its ears and gets an adoring doggy gaze.

"Meet Applesauce," Margot says, as Will crouches to pet the dog properly. "She loves applesauce, can't get enough of it. She's also an attention whore, so you're now going to be dealing with her forever."

"I'll live," Will says, as Applesauce bumps up against him. Margot moves further into the house, and without her watching Will is free to kneel down properly, wrap his arms around warm, solid dogness and hold on. Applesauce rests her oddly-shaped little head on his shoulder and licks his ear, vibrating with her ecstasy over all the attention.

He hasn’t gotten to pet a dog in years.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Margot and Will finally get round to Talking About It.

After that night spent in Margot's spare room, curled up with Applesauce and dreaming of quiet night forests, his life…changes. Improves. Will's never been good at maintaining friendships, but he gets the impression Margot isn't either, and so they find an odd shared space full of comfortable silences. If he's not on night shift, he'll go round to her bar and sit with her till closing, and sometimes they'll meet up at a dog park with Applesauce during the day if they're not too exhausted. When he finally bows to the inevitable and rents the cheapest apartment he can find in the Baltimore suburbs, Margot drives him and his two bags over, then drags him off to Target to buy dishes and bed linens and all the myriad things you need in a home, things he's almost forgotten about. She doesn't laugh at him, not once, even when she sees him blinking owlishly at a shelf of washcloths.

Will has a friend. Even back in New Orleans, this didn't happen very often. He and his partner had been close, a mixture of the camaraderie that naturally built between co-workers in a job like that, and the man being one of the most open-minded people Will has ever met. He'd meant to stay in contact, but that had gone to shit along with everything else.

After…that, he'd honestly considered his life over. Will had been far too stubborn to give any serious thought to suicide, but he certainly hadn't expected to live another decade. Now, as he helps Margot sort out what of his new collection of kitchen utensils can go in which drawer of his new tiny kitchen, a wave of unreality hits him and he has to hold onto the counter for a second to keep upright. Margot clocks it, but she doesn't say a word, and the sudden warm affection he feels for her takes his breath away all over again.

When they're done unpacking, Margot pours the whiskey she brought with her into a couple of Will's new mugs, and they settle on the old couch together. It makes an almost animal noise at their weight, and they both snort with laughter. Relaxed and loose, they settle into a slow, casual conversation. Applesauce has been put on an applesauce-less diet, on the vet's orders, and Will's boss has fired him in a fit of paranoia after mistaking some of his tics for withdrawal symptoms. Margot steals his phone – cheap and only purchased after he met her – out of his pocket and adds the number of a mechanic she knows, who runs a workshop not too far from Will's new home and who will apparently trust Margot's recommendation enough to consider hiring him without reference.

"If you're actually any good at car repair," she teases, and Will elbows her and grabs his phone back.

“How do you know the owner of a garage that well, anyway?” While Margot hasn’t told him…anything, really, about her past, Will’s confident that she comes from money.

Margot grins easily. “She’s an ex.”

“And, uh, that won’t be awkward?”

“She’s a very friendly ex. We parted on good terms under bad circumstances.” A shadow passes across her face, and Will is briefly sorry he spoke. Then Margot’s phone chimes softly, and she fishes it out her pocket. The smile she gives it is small and sweet, entirely unconscious, and Will can’t supress his shiver.

Of course the couch creaks at his movement, and Margot glances up at him. Will turns his head away. The temptation to apologise is strong, but his friend has put a ban on apologies made out of social obligation on the basis that she never makes them either if she can help it.

“I never asked how you and your girlfriend met,” he says softly, as a peace offering.

Margot looks away with a slightly sheepish smile. “It was complicated. I’m not sure if it’s something you’d want to know about me.”

“I’m not exactly an easy man to shock.”

“No you are not.” Margot studies him carefully, then nods to herself. “I won’t try to sugar coat it. She murdered my brother for me.”

Will blinks, more at the phrasing than the information within it. “For you?”

The smile that pulls at her lips barely deserves the name – it’s cold and angry and grieving all at once. “As a gift, I suppose you could say.” She looks over at him to see how she’s taking it, a defiant set to her thin shoulders. “You see her as a monster, don’t you? I came out the womb with a monster, grew up side by side with one. And everybody around me knew, and they just…” She trails off and takes a drink, but when she starts speaking again there’s still the faintest break in her voice. “They just let him do whatever he wanted to whoever he wanted – the whoever he wanted generally, of course, being me. Because they were scared, or they were servants and couldn’t do anything about it, or they didn’t believe me, they didn’t want to believe me. Or because they just didn’t care. I was, ultimately, expendable. They didn’t mind leave *me* to be his punching bag. In fact, I don’t believe a single person ever defended me. Not until her.”

Margot knocks back the rest of her drink, re-crosses her legs. “Whatever she is, however strange and dangerous, she’s never hurt me. That’s more than I could have said for every mortal in my life. Far more than I could have said for my own twin.”

“I understand,” Will says, and he does. Another part of the mystery that is Margot is coming together for him. “Can you understand why I can’t trust that?”

Margot actually laughs, a bitter twist to her lips. “For the same reason I can’t trust doctors, or teachers, or cops, or pretty much anyone in a position of authority, I’d imagine. We got bitten, and now we’re twice as shy. Which is smart of us, from an evolutionary stand point.”

“Not so smart when you need to go get your blood pressure checked,” Will points out.

“I suppose,” Margot replies. “I just tend not to. Nothing’s stopped working yet.” She sets down her glass with a soft *clink* and turns to face him. “My trauma is nebulous, it doesn’t have a centre. It floats freely over every aspect of my life up until five years ago. The only way I could avoid everything that makes me want to scream is by becoming a hermit, which I won’t do on principle. You, you’re different.”

Will lets his eyes fix on Margot’s collar as she continues, her gaze too intense to hold. “I don’t know what happened to you, I personally hope to God I never find out, but I can tell it has a specific focus, a very clear centre. There are, actually, places you could go and be entirely untouched by reminders of it.”

“I know,” Will forces out.

“I know you do. So why, Will Graham, are you still here, in a city you know has a reasonable fae presence, drinking with a faery’s girlfriend?”

The word makes him flinch. Despite it being their first point of contact, they don’t talk about the fae if they can help it. He always got the impression that was Margot humouring him.

Apparently she’s not doing that anymore.

“If I knew,” he tells her softly, controlling his voice as much as he can right now, “I would have isolated the part of me responsible and, uh, cut it out.”

Margot smiles, a little bitter but not without kindness. “Doesn’t work like that, I’m afraid. You can control it, or use it, or repress it, but at the end of the day you’ve got what you’ve got, and it’s not going away just because you want it to.”

Any words he could say in reply stick in Will’s throat like brick dust, and he has to breathe carefully to stop them choking him.

He almost flinches when Margot leans over and rests her hand on his. “I’m sure you know by now that controlling something is easier when you know its name.”

Will nods; he knows it as coldly and intimately as he knows the thing that lives in his memories and his nightmares. But he doesn’t know what to call this *thing* he’s spent so long carefully not thinking about, doesn’t pretend to know why he hasn’t run yet.

You really shouldn’t lie so much, William. It is a terrible habit, or so I am told.

One truth he does know – as many problems as he’s always had making himself look, once he’s managed it he has just as many problems making himself look away. It’s why he went into the police, why he was intending to do forensic work until that all went to shit – he’d

figured he might as well *use* it for something, like a chair made of bone, or antler. Grotesque but useful.

Is there a use for it, here? This morbid fascination with the object of his own trauma, the way his dreams return night after night to a house, pale and then dark and then pale again, snatches of music and strange laughter and cold hands brushing the hair back from his face –

He'd had a dog, in New Orleans. Or, he'd fed a stray dog so often she'd almost been his. Only problem was, she'd been terrified of cops. Will reckoned she'd had a bad experience with one, because she recognised the uniform the way only an animal conditioned with fear could. She'd snarl and growl at him if he was wearing it, even though he was sure she recognised his scent.

So one day he'd come up to her in just the trousers and boots, and she'd been fine with him. Then he'd worn the uniform shirt, and she hadn't like that, but he'd paired it with pyjama pants that must have smelled of him, as well as a large quantity of chicken offal. By the time he left New Orleans, she hadn't cared what he was wearing. And instead of wasting energy and endangering herself trying to run off any cops she saw, she'd simply avoided them like she avoided pretty much anyone who wasn't Will.

Habituation to the Fair Folk. God knows it's not the worst idea he's ever had.

"Can I meet her?" he asks, hardly daring to believe he's doing it.

Margot's eyebrow goes up, but she's smiling, tentative but happy. "Sure you can. Actually, I think you two will get along."

Will wants to snort derisively at that, but he can't bring himself to. He sips his drink and reflects that if this faery is the reason Margot can talk to him like this, bearing her heart and her scars to a guy she met less than a month ago, he can probably bring himself not to run like fuck.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

An unexpected guest at Margot and Alana's puts a few things into perspective.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not that he would ever admit it, but Margot's right. Will and Alana do get along.

He's fairly certain 'Alana' is as much the faery's actual name as 'Hannibal Lecter', but it's the name Margot calls her, and there's a funny warm glow to being trusted with it, knowing the value of such a gesture. Not the sort of feeling he ever expected, but then he never expected to be relaxing on the couch with his friend and her dog while a faery cooked them dinner.

The first time Alana had asked if Will would stay for dinner, only Margot's hand on his had kept him from bolting. Then Alana had looked up, blinked in surprise, and said "Oh, sorry. Eat freely, without obligation." The words had been so casual, an unthinking courtesy, and he'd had to duck the restroom and try not to cry all over the sink.

Today he's wonderfully calm, petting Applesauce while Alana and Margot chat. It's nice to sit back and let their company wash over him. Sort of like New Orleans again, when Louis would have him over for dinner every time they closed a case. He and Jada were nothing like Margot and Alana, but they'd had the same easy banter, the mark of the happily married – or happily partnered at least, traditional marriage probably isn't something faeries make a habit of. The food smells entirely different – Jada and Louis had made Creole food, Southern food. Alana's making lasagne. But they're just as understanding about letting Will fade into the couch while they talk.

It's good. Peaceful.

The doorbell chimes, discordant with the low, sweet jazz Margot put on earlier, shocking him out of his little bubble of quiet. It shocks Applesauce too – she barks, then jumps off the couch and trots towards the hallway, glancing over her shoulder to check if somebody's following her.

"Alana?" Margot asks.

"No, I wasn't expecting anyone and no, I can't get the door," Alana replies, her attention on a pot of tomato-y something on the stove. Margot rolls her eyes good-naturedly and gets up to follow Applesauce out.

A flash of stupid fear gets Will in the gut when he realises that he's now alone with Alana, and he wishes Applesauce hadn't left. She must notice – his ability to read fae is scattershot, but he's learned that Alana is frighteningly perceptive of human emotion, unlike most of her kind – but she just continues cooking, humming quietly along to the music. She's perfectly in tune.

Alana isn't like any faery Will's ever met. He wouldn't call her human – there's an uncanny sense of distance in the way she interacts with the human world, he could never mistake her for being part of it – but she does seem less alien. Maybe it's Margot's influence. Before seeing the two of them together, Will would have put money on the fae being incapable of love, but now he's not so sure. Whatever Alana feels for Margot, if it isn't love as a human would understand it, it's close enough for government work.

He can see it again when Margot re-enters the room. Alana's body shifts subtly, as if some part of her Will can't see has turned to focus on her partner. It reminds him oddly of a cat brushing past its person before settling in a chair, a quiet *hello you're here*, and he surprises himself by finding it endearing.

Will is so focused on Alana, that when she turns around fully and he twists to see what she's looking at, he nearly jumps out of his skin. He'd completely missed the other person coming in.

She's pale and very thin, maybe eighteen or nineteen, with dark hair cut feathery around her shoulders and practical clothes in expensive-looking fabrics. Her eyes are a brilliant blue, almost fluorescent, and there is something *wrong* about her. Will doesn't even have to look for it, it's so obvious and unhidden. And, oh God, very fucking familiar.

The horror-movie-slow creep of frost over dead skin, dark moonless nights in barren forests filled with snow and the howls of starving wolves, hunger so profound the emptiness has gravity and crushing weight –

Applesauce's warm head butts against his hand and Will's fingers slide into her fur reflexively. He closes his eyes and pets her as he pulls himself back into his own head and tries to ground himself, to calm his sudden panic. Margot is here, she's his friend, she would never allow someone to hurt him. Alana wouldn't, either – he is her guest, and she takes hospitality seriously. Whatever the fuck this is, he's safe.

When he feels strong enough to open his eyes, he finds Margot looking at him with carefully hidden concern, and the…girl…staring at the floor. Her cheeks are flushed in obvious mortification. That she couldn't hide herself, that she frightened him so much, that she came onto someone else's land and nearly gave another guest a panic attack, shit, she must have broken, like, ten different *geasa*, is Alana going to be angry?

She's incredibly easy to read, almost as easy as another human. The surprise of that penetrates the fear, and steadies him a little more.

Margot moves to sit beside him, putting herself between Will and the girl, protecting him because he obviously can't protect himself. The thought leaves Will with a hot rush of shame; how much is his own and how much is reflected from the girl he can't say. She shoots one of

those couple-stares at Alana, who smiles reassuringly at the girl and ushers her into the kitchen. “I’m really sorry…” Will hears the girl say, before their voices drop too low to hear.

“Sorry to spring that on you,” Margot says, and he hates that she still looks worried, in her own Margot-ish way. “Abigail has a standing invitation to drop in whenever she likes, but normally she lets us know first.”

“What happened this time?” Will’s fear is making him a little angry at the girl, and he tries to put it aside. It seems rude.

“Trouble at home, probably. Again.” At Will’s quizzical look, she gives a wry smile. “Trust me, telenovas have nothing on fae drama.”

“She’s Lecter’s…” Will trails off when he realises he doesn’t know what to say. Child? Do fae reproduce? He’s never bothered to ask before.

“Daughter would probably be the best way of putting it. I’m pretty sure Abigail’s currently the equivalent of a teenager, complete with equivalent teenage angst.” She snorts, then sighs. “Oh, I shouldn’t make fun. She doesn’t say a lot to me, but I don’t get the impression it’s much fun to be Abigail at the moment.”

Will remembers that house, dark and lush as the insides of some great beast, and shudders. No, he can’t imagine it is much fun, living there. Living there with Lecter.

Satisfied that Will isn’t going to run away screaming, Margot settles in with a book and Applesauce sandwiched between them. Apparently dinner is going to be postponed for a while. Between them, Alana and Margot have a huge menagerie of books, and Will gets up to find the one he started last time he was here.

They read in slightly strained silence for about half an hour, Will getting periodically distracted by the low murmur of conversation in the kitchen. Eventually Margot gets tired of seeing him repress his twitches and swings her legs round into his lap. Will lets one of his hands rest on the hard bone of her shin, fingers curled gently around the muscle beneath it. She hums to let him know he’s welcome to leave his hand there, and they both go back to their books.

The pressure of another body against his and the warmth of her skin seeps into his twitching muscles, and he smiles down at the page, warm with affection for his friend. Then he hears Abigail and Alana coming out of the kitchen and something clicks into place behind his eyes.

Margot, his friend. His friend who lives with Alana, who associates with Lecter. Alana, who associates with Abigail, who is Lecter’s probably-daughter, who is now smiling politely and cautiously at him with eyes that are so nearly human as she leaves.

Margot, his friend, who Lecter pointed him to, in the knowledge that they’d like each other. Become close, develop a relationship that Will would be reluctant to abandon by leaving the city and therefore Hannibal’s sphere of influence, a relationship that would keep them connected no matter how far out of his way Will went to avoid him. A hold Will wouldn’t think to struggle against, but which would keep him down all the same. A long, loose leash.

He blinks back into the room to find Abigail gone and Margot watching him with concern back in her eyes. “Excuse me,” he tells her, and hurries away from her, into the hallway and out the front door.

“Uh, Abigail?”

She turns on the step, another tentative smile poised on her lips. Her shyness and lingering embarrassment leaches some more of his knee-jerk fear of her.

Will takes a deep breath, trying to steady his heart. “Please tell Dr Lecter that I know exactly what he’s playing at, and I’m not impressed.”

Abigail cocks her head, almost birdlike. “Okaaay,” she mutters, then visibly decides not to ask.

“Well, bye then,” she says, and turns to walk down the driveway. He’s half expecting to see a car, but Abigail just keeps going until she gets to the woods, and further, until the bare winter trees swallow her up. When she’s gone, Will lets himself sag slightly, leaning back against the doorframe.

Jesus, he’s goading a faery. He should be scared out his mind right now, not so fucking pleased with himself.

It’s so stupidly good, though, to feel in control of something for once.

Chapter End Notes

not super happy with this chapter but hey, abigail!! hannibal will be back soon and creepy as ever, don't worry.

this is the last chapter i have written up, so i think i'm going to have to switch to updating every two weeks. sorry folks.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Abigail has questions. Will has too few answers for anyone's liking, least of all his own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Judy Vasquez is hands down the best boss he's ever had. If she gives a shit about his twitchiness and various quirks, he's never noticed, and she doesn't make him talk to customers. Will gets to hide in the back of the shop with the engines and boat motors and do his thing. Her business is well established enough to have a steady stream of work, and he's making more than double the money he made at the corner store, so he has to dip into Lecter's money less and less every day.

If he could stop thinking about whatever the fuck Lecter is playing at – because there's definitely more to this, layers and layers of byzantine fae bullshit, Will can just *tell* – everything would be perfect.

He's buried in the engine of some soccer mom's mysteriously dead minivan – Will is fairly sure he's been cleaning out oil-covered chip crumbs in places where they physically should not be – when he hears Judy say "Yeah, sweetie, Graham's in. He's just down the back." It can't be Margot; while she and Judy are still friendly, Will can't imagine they've reached the pet-names stage of post breakup familiarity, and he's at a loss for who else it could be.

By the time Will's managed to extricate himself from his work, the footsteps have almost reached him. He looks up and, just for a second, he swears his heart stops.

Abigail's shoulders are hunched, curled just a little in on herself. She's very unsure – of him, of her welcome – and he's reminded of a deer poised on the edge of flight. For a good half minute, they just stare at each other.

"Alana told me you worked here," Abigail gets out finally. "Not like she thought I'd come and see you or anything, just. It came up in conversation."

"Okay," Will says, for lack of any other ideas. Then, just to be safe – "Did Lecter send you?"

"No, Hannibal doesn't even know I'm here." Her shoulders straighten a little and her expression goes mulish. Whatever the hell else she is, she looks so much like a teenager in that moment that it's a real struggle not to smile.

"Any particular reason you're –" *sort of stalking me, showing up at where I work, showing any interest in me at all* "– here?"

“Maybe I was bored.” It’s a very obvious dodge, not nearly artless enough to scare him, but neither does it exactly fill him with confidence. Abigail sees him stiffening, and she hunches a little again. “Look, I’m willing to swear on whatever you like that I don’t mean you harm, and that I’m not going to report back to Hannibal or anyone else.”

“You really shouldn’t offer something like that, it could be dangerous.” She flushes slightly, and Will kicks himself. “Alright, how about you swear on Applesauce?”

She raises an eyebrow. “That’s risky.”

“Not really,” Will replies, crossing to the sink to try and scrub off as much oil as he can. “If you break that one, Alana will definitely kill you.”

Abigail finally smiles. “If Margot didn’t get me first.”

He doesn’t intend to go anywhere with a strange faery, but at some point he found himself noticing how awfully thin she is, and so they end up in Judy’s favourite diner. She gets takeout from there sometimes, and while the food’s no better than decent, the portion sizes are some of the largest relative to price he’s ever had.

Abigail, judging by her raised brow, doesn’t buy his hurried excuse about forgetting lunch, but she doesn’t seem bothered. All she says is “I’m paying for my stuff,” in the defiant-masking-nervous tone Will knows he’d take if some stranger offered to buy him lunch. He nods amiably, and looks on, impressed despite himself, as Abigail orders three different mains and digs in with relish. By the time Will’s finished his sandwich, she’s started in on the third plate.

It would almost be funny, if Will wasn’t vividly reminded of the dozens of skinny, neglected kids he’d seen, on the job in New Orleans and on the streets in Baltimore.

Firmly telling the little voice saying it isn’t any of his business and he doesn’t want to get involved anyway to can it, he takes a deep breath and asks, “Abigail, does Lecter, uh, starve you?”

She stares at him blankly – fair enough, that wasn’t Will at his most tactful – then snorts. “Oh god, no. It’s not...it’s just how I am. Now.”

A lot of things that he really should have put together become a bit clearer. In Will’s defence, it’s difficult to know what’s possible in this other world he tries not to think about too much, and it’s not as if anyone ever gave him a manual. “You were human, weren’t you? And he made you like him.” Whatever *like him* entails, apart from a lot of strong sense impression of ominous cold things and way too much power for Will’s comfort.

Abigail hunches a little as she anticipates his next question. “Hannibal didn’t do anything I didn’t ask him to.” She glances down into the remains of her lunch, and scrapes up a last few bits of food. When she speaks again, her voice is dark and bitter to a depth most humans can’t manage. “Sometimes I wish he had. It’d be a lot easier if he had.”

“Then you’d be able to hate him.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Abigail looks up at him then, and it strikes Will again just how brightly blue her eyes are. “Do you hate Hannibal? Or are you just afraid of him?”

Will very carefully doesn’t flinch. “I think fear is a reasonable reaction to Dr Lecter, don’t you?”

“Fair.” She leans forward, as if confiding a secret. “I used to be so scared of him.”

“But not anymore?”

Abigail’s smile is a complicated thing, full of things he can’t name. “He won’t hurt me. Not really, not now. I’m his family. I’m all the family he’s got.”

“Cain and Abel were family,” Will points out.

She snorts again. “The priest at Sunday school used to tell us the story of Cain and Abel was all about the brotherhood of humanity. Cain rejects his bond with his brother, and so he doesn’t get to have that brotherhood again. He has to spend the rest of his life wandering alone. Even God’s special protection for him just separates him from the rest of them further.”

“Them?” Will asks, and she shrugs and smiles sheepishly.

“I’m not going to pretend to be something I’m not. I tried that enough as a human.” She cuts herself off quickly after that, moving her knife and fork to the side of her last plate, European-style. He wonders if Lecter taught her that.

“Is that what you wanted, when you let Lecter change you? A separation from humanity?” Will feels almost proud of himself, that he can’t imagine why someone would *choose* to give up their humanity like that.

Abigail weighs her words, but she’s too young to have the silver tongue that has fucked him over so often with her kind before. “Maybe. Maybe I just wanted not to be jerked around by someone stronger than me for once.”

“If that was the case,” Will points out, “you may have gone about it wrong.”

Finally, she laughs. “Maybe, yeah.”

Now he judges Abigail is relaxed enough that he can push her a little, Will leans forward. “So. Why did you actually come find me?”

“Multiple reasons, really.” She doesn’t fiddle or twist her hands or look past him, but it’s still very obviously a stall.

“Try one.”

“I wanted to know why you were so scared of me.”

Not a lie, and Will can admit that's fair enough. "That's easy. You're a faery. More to the point, you're the same sort of faery as the last one who very nearly kidnapped me."

Abigail gives him a twisted little grin. "He let you go. Trust me, if Hannibal wanted to keep you he would have."

Very comforting, I'm sure. "So this *is* about Hannibal."

She covers decently. "Isn't everything in our lives these days?"

Will's running out of time, his lunch break almost over, and he's tired of everyone side-stepping. Childish as it is, he can't help but wish something would be easy, for once. "You can just ask me."

Abigail leans forward to mirror him, voice falling. Something behind her blue, blue mostly-human eyes focuses on him with a hungry, reptilian precision, and Will fights to stop a shiver. It's the most inhuman he's seen Abigail look. "Why *did* he let you go?"

That could mean a lot of things; *what makes you so special, why did he allow you your freedom and not me, what did you do, what is he going to do*. "If you figure it out, let me know. It beats me."

"I'd ask him," Abigail muses, "but he isn't the best with straight answers." If she's disappointed at his non-response, she's hiding it well, and the alien interest he'd just seen has faded, or been hidden too.

Will can't say he likes how causally she discusses his potential imprisonment, but he does find himself liking Abigail. Not the helpless, foreign gravitational pull of a glamour; she's just human enough to be understandable, and there's something familiar about her. Maybe because she reminds Will a little of himself.

When he finally does have to go back to work, Abigail walks with him. They don't talk, but the silence is comfortable, like with Louis or Margot. Any other faery, and he'd be seriously worried at his own ease, but Abigail's continued presence has inured him to the *cold dark dying starving* impression he gets off her, and without it he can't find much to be afraid of.

When he reaches the back entrance to the workshop, Abigail smiles tentatively at him; the same expression she'd worn the first time they met. "So," she asks, "can I stop by again?"

Will realises, very suddenly, that Abigail is incredibly lonely.

Why? he means to say, or *surely you know* someone *your own age, whatever your own age is,* or *give me one good reason why I should trust you.*

"Sure," is what he says instead.

When Abigail smiles again, any artifice or wild-animal wariness falls away. Will can see the eighteen year old girl who must have been there before she let Lecter rip her humanity away, before whatever else happened to make her ask him to.

“Thank you,” she tells him, and the words ring heavier than they would in a human’s voice. Before Will can wonder what exactly he’s gotten himself into now, she turns and walks away, losing herself in the crowd.

Shaking his head, Will ducks back inside. Fae bullshit or no fae bullshit, that minivan motor isn’t going to fix itself.

Chapter End Notes

it's a week late bc i am a human dustbin. i would apologise, but i know i will soon be apologising again and you’ll tire of that eventually, so i have to consider using apologies sparingly.

next chapter: hannibal returns.....

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Will meets Lecter again. Lecter is definitely the only one happy about this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The corridor seemed much shorter a minute ago, before Will started down it, but now it stretches before him for miles, white walls and black accented décor and no windows, not anywhere. Something is wrong with this house, a slight but fundamental shift in the world around him, like coming into your home and finding everything moved an inch to the right. Will can barely walk in a straight line.

It occurs to him that he might have been drugged, but his mind is perfectly, horribly clear. It's his body that's letting him down. His legs drag, muscles weak as a baby's. If only we could go back to that wonderful, warm bed, his body seems to say, or just lie down here and curl up and sleep a little longer.

Will pushes on, stumbling into walls, trying not to look too hard at the black statues spaced along the walls. Something about them raises the hairs on the back of his neck, as if they might be watching him. The doors all look the same, and none of them look like the front door he vaguely remembers being carried through – how long ago? He wants to say it was yesterday, but some niggling voice in the back of his mind is convinced it's been longer.

Finally he sees it, the glass front door with the elegant fanning patterns of metal, clean morning light shining through it from outside. Will's knees almost go with relief and he laughs at himself, at how worked up he got over nothing at all. Of course he's only been here a night, and God only knows how much he had at that bar, it must have screwed with him something awful. And here Will thought he could hold his liquor. Then again, the little voice whispers, didn't someone spike his drink? It's just on the edge of his memory.

He reaches for the handle, cold and smooth, and turns it, flinging the door open.

Pale walls, dark furnishings, and that bed – the sheets aren't rumpled anymore, they're smooth and clean as they must have been when he first got here – and Will is now coldly certain that wasn't last night. He takes a stumbling step back, and another, collapsing backwards and falling through another door, into the same room, pyjamas still folded over the chair where he left them, glass of water still on the night stand.

In front of him, the door swings shut with a click. With another click, it locks him in.

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The next day, Will looks so terrible even Judy doesn't rag on him about it. He tries to tell himself he's grateful to be left alone after that hellish night, that he doesn't miss the friendly teasing, and mostly succeeds.

At least Abigail will probably come today. Will's been getting a sense for her moods, the past few weeks, and while she'll never do something so pedestrian as announce herself or call ahead, he can predict when she's going to show up. Today feels like one of those.

Abigail keeps him waiting, and Will's stomach is grumbling by the time he hears Judy direct her to his station. She says something else, and Abigail replies, their voices too quiet for Will to hear. When he hears Abigail's sensible boots come nearer, he looks up from his work and blinks in surprise.

Not that he'll tell her, but Abigail doesn't look much better than he feels. She's still nicely put together, but there are shadows under her eyes and she's holding herself funny, like a bird with a broken wing. He raises an eyebrow at her and she sighs.

"Don't ask. Seriously, it's stupid and I really can't be bothered to get into it again."

Probably Will should ask anyway, but he's never been good at those things where someone says one thing and expects him to do another. If Abigail needed to talk to someone she would have gone to Alana, who seems to have a much better handle on this sort of thing. So instead he scrubs his hands clean, grabs his coat and suggests a walk.

Last night's snow may have been ground into dirty slush on the roads and sidewalks, but in the tiny park near the garage, it's still crisp and white over the grass and crowning the trees. Even with a main road right next to them, walking into the park has a curious effect on the world. Sounds seem to become muted, and the air smells that little bit fresher. Will would be inclined to find it creepy, but Abigail tilts her head back and sighs happily, a little spring in her step.

They're chatting idly about Will's work – Abigail is obviously desperate for distraction, and he's happy to humour her – when Will sees someone walking towards them, out of the corner of his eye. Then Abigail's head shoots up and she hisses a swear word, eyes wide.

The man – for lack of a better word – falls into step beside them, and Will would swear the air temperature plummets even further.

"You," Will manages through numb lips.

"Me." Lecter smiles politely, eyes glittering. "Hello, Ainsel."

Without his consent, Will's eyes flick to Abigail. She sees, and her expression darkens with hurt. "I didn't tell him," she says sharply.
~~~

Will wants to apologise, tell her he knows that, of course he does, but before he can Lecter shoots her a look over his head, one he can't read. Abigail's answering glare is colder than anything he's seen from her before. She ducks her head and turns, walking quickly away. Lecter doesn't chase after her – too undignified – but Will's pretty sure he wants to, and is only letting her go because he knows he'll be able to find her again.

Will considers going after her, but Abigail is as adept at losing a pursuer as any forest animal, and once she leaves the park and joins the thin stream of people on the sidewalk, he loses track of her. Of course, there's always the possibility that she's turning invisible.

Fucking faeries.

Shame quickly twists into anger, an ugly reflex he's never been able to control, and only ingrained wariness stops him rounding on Lecter. Even with his eyes trained on the slushy path, his voice is far sharper than is safe. "Have you been following me?"

"I don't need to follow you," Lecter tells him, and of course not. The blood, the *fucking* blood. Impotent fear feeds his anger and Will wonders if that isn't intentional on Lecter's part; knocking him off balance so he'll say something stupid, so Lecter can hurt him and say he had it coming.

"It may comfort you to know I wasn't looking for you. Abigail's behaviour has been erratic lately, and I'm concerned about her. She's very dear to me."

Not a lie, obviously, but Lecter wouldn't have had to be looking for Will specifically to intend on finding him anyway. Could be chance, or random coincidence, or Lecter knowing who Abigail would run off to see. He can feel a headache building behind his right eye. With Alana and Abigail, he never feels like this, like he has to weigh every word and any mistake could be his last. He definitely has not missed it.

He tries to bite his tongue, he really does, but he keeps seeing Abigail's back as she hurries away, the way she stood as she told him not to ask, to give her space and let her hurt in peace. In the back of his mind, he wonders when he got so damn *attached*, and how the hell he let this happen with a faery of all fucking things.

"Maybe Abigail wouldn't behave so erratically if you were a bit better at parenting her, or whatever it is you think you're doing, but that's not really my business, is it?"

"Isn't it? You appear to think otherwise." There's no censure in Lecter's tone, just amusement, like it's hilarious that Will would dare to call him out on anything. Which, fair enough, it sort of is, in that hysterical way that an improbable death is funny.

He tears his eyes off the ground and looks, then he *looks*. The edge of his vision seems to crackle, hoarfrost creeping over it like it crept over the black plastic of the dumpster, seven weeks and forever ago. That really should scare him, but for the first time that day, Will feels perfectly calm.

Lecter's mind is like any faery's; open in a way that humans just *aren't*, but almost entirely opaque to him. Will's been called psychic before, even pretended to be as a child on the

occasions, but with humans his empathy is nothing more fantastical than the same empathy most humans already have – just *more*. It's different with the fae. Stranger, so much more dangerous.

He looks, and he *sees*, then he straightens his shoulders and stuffs his hands in his jacket before they can start shaking.

"You know, you can't take someone's humanity and expect them not to have mixed feelings about it. Yes, even if they asked you to. And," he continues, letting the things he sees in Lecter's terrible alien bear trap of a mind colour his voice, "you can't make someone love you by taking away everything else they have."

Lecter's human face has gone perfectly blank, every muscle still. There's nothing for Will's mind to catch on, no way to tell what he's thinking, and he can feel faint tremors begin to spread through his muscles. "My intention wasn't to trap Abigail."

"But that was the consequence of your actions."

"One has to level a field of wildflowers, if one needs the land to grow crops. Creation requires destruction." Lecter tilts his head slightly to the side; it makes him look very similar to Abigail, and entirely inhuman. Will wants desperately to break eye contact but it feels too much like running, like showing his back.

"And everything has a price, yeah yeah yeah. Probably not much comfort to the foxes and the deer." God, he'd be lucky if Lecter didn't tear his tongue out right here, but Will's started now and he can't bring himself to stop. He's known Abigail for less than a month, but she's something almost like a young girl and she's in terrible pain and he likes her, damnit, and Lecter is hurting her and won't even admit to it.

Oh well. Will's had a decent run. "*You* may have been so cold and fucked up and monstrous already that you didn't notice what you'd lost. *Abigail* wasn't. She's allowed to be angry about that."

For a good few seconds, Lecter just *looks* at him, and Will mentally says his prayers. At least Alana will avenge him.

Then, quite suddenly, Lecter's face is animated again, and he even *smiles*. A deeply disturbing smile, but still. "Perhaps you have some suggestions for me, since you seem so invested."

Will blinks, reeling from the change of tone. Then he considers.

The thing is, Lecter means it when he says he cares for Abigail. Even if he could lie, Will's touched his mind three times now, enough to notice how comparatively unsettled he is. Worried, he'd call it, if the fae even *do* worried. The kind of emotion you only get with genuine care behind it. And however tempted Will is to tell Lecter to go fuck himself and be done with it, God knows Abigail needs all the help she can get.

"You're serious?"

“Yes, why not?” Lecter shrugs, dark eyes shining, and Will *knows* this is a terrible idea, that it’s going to lead him further and further into whatever this strange, terrifying being has been planning for him, but.

Abigail.

Hell. Why not indeed?

“Alright, sure,” he says, “but if you offer to buy me dinner I will find some iron and I will stab you with it.”

“I have no doubt.” Lecter’s smile has definitely shifted to a smirk, and Will knows what he’s going to ask before he opens his mouth. “If we’re to co-parent, I should probably know your name. It’s only polite, no?”

Gritting his teeth against rising regret, Will turns and starts walking to the closest coffee shop. He’s tired, he’s cold, and he will be damned if he makes himself uncomfortable on this particular faery’s account. “You have all the name you’re going to get. Don’t push it, Lecter.”

“Please,” Lecter says, falling into step beside him, looking casual and affable and so, so dangerous, “call me Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

dumps chapter a week and a day late, shuffles feet sadly
on the other hand, this is now the longest thing ive ever written, so congrats to me i guess?

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